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High-level segment

GENERAL STATEMENTS BY PARTICIPANTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE VOLUNTARY TRUST FUND FOR ASSISTANCE IN MINE CLEARANCE

International efforts to address the global problem of uncleared land-mines

Note by the Secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The global problem of uncleared land-mines is one of the most widespread and serious humanitarian problems currently confronting the international community. The scope of the problem is of such magnitude that it can only be addressed through concerted action on the part of the international community. It is for this reason that, in response to General Assembly resolution 49/215 of 23 December 1994, the Secretary-General decided to convene, at short notice, an International Meeting on Mine Clearance.

2. The objective of this International Meeting is to provide a forum for enhancing international awareness to the different dimensions of the land-mines crisis and to strengthen international cooperation in this field. During the high-level segment of the Meeting, Governments that wish to do so will be invited to make statements on the issue and will have an opportunity on that occasion to announce contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance established by the Secretary-General in November 1994. Information regarding the Trust Fund will also be provided.

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II. SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM OF LAND-MINES

3. Estimates indicate that there are presently between 95 million and 110 million land-mines scattered throughout 64 countries, some of which were laid over 50 years ago. An estimated 30 people are killed daily by uncleared land-mines, and perhaps as many as 60 people are maimed. Most of these victims are innocent civilians - women, children and the elderly - who, in the aftermath of conflict, continue to be denied a normal life (the fruits of peace). Even more alarming is the continued worsening of the situation. In 1994, all the mine-clearance operations world wide found and destroyed an estimated 100,000 land-mines - a mere fraction of the estimated number currently deployed. While such efforts were ongoing, it is estimated that between 2 million and 5 million new land-mines were laid in 1994 during conflicts in States in Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and South-East Asia.

4. In many of these mine-affected countries, the problem with uncleared land-mines is so severe that it inhibits national development and distorts normal social evolution. In the most severely affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Angola and Cambodia, land-mines impede the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons; render arable land useless; paralyse key elements of national infrastructure, such as electrical-power grids, water-delivery systems, roads and railroads; and overload already over-burdened medical and welfare systems.

5. While the national impact of land-mines can be devastating, their true cost must be measured in individual terms. In many developing countries, large rural populations depend upon agriculture and other forms of natural-resource extraction for their sustenance. Without the ability to farm or harvest agricultural products, these populations face the imminent prospect of further degradation, dislocation and even starvation, not to mention death or maiming by land-mines. Despite these circumstances, populations continue to enter mined areas in search of food. Land-mine casualties among farmers or to those gathering fire-wood or those looking for water are a regular occurrence. In areas where frequent casualties occur, locals cease striving to utilize such land, and arable land falls into disuse. In such areas, food deficits become common, and large numbers of people become displaced.

6. For those unfortunate enough to be injured by a land-mine, a life of begging is often their only option. In agricultural communities, where the value of a person is commonly measured by the productive agricultural labour performed, land-mine victims are often seen as having ceased to be productive members of the community. No longer able to provide for their families, such victims are often ostracized, their lives ruined.

III. PROBLEMS IN MINE CLEARANCE

7. It is the fundamental responsibility of a State to protect its citizens from harm. This includes responsibility for removing lethal objects, such as land-mines or unexploded ordnance. However, many countries simply do not have the capability to address the many dimensions of the land-mine problem. Even the resources to establish programmes to provide immediate mine-awareness education, in order to reduce risk, are often lacking. De-mining is a long-

term, expensive process that may take decades to complete. On the other hand, the most affected countries are usually those most lacking in resources and in need of basic development assistance. This dichotomy between the need to remove land-mines and the need for a country to have or to create an economic capacity sufficient to establish and to support a mine-clearance programme leaves many lesser developed States helpless against a land-mine threat.

8. More than any other type of weapon, land-mines have effects that extend far beyond the limits of battlefields, affecting many facets of national life. It is one of the ironies of land-mines that, while they are inexpensive and easy to lay, they are long-lasting and extremely difficult to find and clear. Some of the small anti-personnel land-mines sell for less than US$ 3. The same land-mine may cost between $300 and $1,000 - or a foot or a leg - to clear. If uncleared, land-mines remain deadly for decades, perhaps centuries.

9. Traditionally, conventional military forces have viewed land-mines as obstacles. In conventional warfare, they are laid to channel enemy forces into particular avenues of approach, to defend key terrain and to inhibit enemy movement. As a consequence, opposition forces view minefields as obstacles to be breached or bypassed. Military counter-mine technology has been almost exclusively focused on clearing narrow avenues through minefields so that forces can pass through the obstacle rapidly. Military mechanical and explosive equipment has generally been developed to clear a 10-metre lane through a minefield quickly under battlefield conditions, often by pushing the land-mines to one side.

10. While these techniques are obviously effective for the military requirement of breaching a minefield, they are of little or no use to civilians faced with the problem of mine clearance after the end of hostilities - and they are of no use at all in dealing with land-mines laid randomly, as is now common in internal conflicts. While considerable resources have been devoted to developing particularly lethal land-mines, little attention has been given to research and development of civilian de-mining equipment and techniques.

11. For civilian purposes, all land-mines must be removed from a village or an agricultural field before it can return to normal or productive use. Clearing a 10-metre lane in a farmer's field or destroying a highway with a mine plough mounted on a tank does nothing to help the civilian population. The lesson learned from de-mining operations in such places as Afghanistan, Cambodia and Mozambique is that, until better technology is developed, de-mining will remain a long-term, low-technology and highly expensive process.

IV. UNITED NATIONS EFFORTS

12. Uncleared land-mines also pose serious problems for United Nations humanitarian and peace-keeping operations. In mine-infested countries such as Angola, land-mines affect all aspects of the United Nations mandate. They make the deployment of humanitarian personnel and peace-keeping troops an extremely slow and dangerous process. They inhibit the reintegration and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons, hinder or make impossible the direct distribution of food and other assistance, prevent aid from reaching specific

areas of need and multiply enormously the logistical problems confronting any United Nations assistance programme.

13. In countries such as Rwanda, where land-mines were randomly scattered, many schools and hospitals were littered with mines. Children are thus at exceptionally high risk, and the work of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and various other humanitarian organizations is made extremely hazardous and vastly more expensive. Where refugees have fled the horrors of war, in countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia, they often pay a heavy cost trying to return to homes and fields littered with land-mines. In April 1995, a lull in the fighting in Kabul encouraged thousands of refugees to return to homes and neighbourhoods that had been heavily mined - often with tragic consequences. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimates that, during this period, the rate of land-mine casualties in Kabul increased to 500 victims per week. In an urgent attempt to help deal with this problem, the United Nations Mine Clearance Programme in Afghanistan diverted de-mining teams from their ongoing clearance efforts and rushed them to Kabul. In such areas, the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations assisting refugees and displaced persons can become extremely dangerous. Often their vehicles are destroyed by anti-tank mines, and their personnel are injured or killed working in mined areas.

14. In heavily mined areas such as Angola and the former Yugoslavia, peace-keeping forces are only able to deploy military observers and peace-keeping troops after careful reconnaissance and survey work to determine safe deployment sites. These forces are then only able to patrol on roads that have been cleared of land-mines and to perform other peace-keeping activities in areas known to be free of mines. The removal of these uncleared land-mines becomes a prerequisite for even the most preliminary steps on the road to national rehabilitation.

15. In 1994, significant progress on the issue of uncleared land-mines was achieved within the United Nations system in a number of areas. As a result of lessons learned in current United Nations mine-clearance programmes, and following inter-departmental/inter-agency consultations convened by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the Secretary-General, in his report on assistance in mine clearance (A/49/357 and Add.1 and 2), put forward the cornerstones of the United Nations policy for assistance in mine clearance. This policy is based on the assumption that only a well-planned, integrated and coordinated approach of the United Nations system will enhance its capacity to address the problem.

16. To that end, the Secretary-General has designated the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to function as the focal point within the United Nations system for mine clearance and land-mine related matters. In late 1994, the Department established its Mine Clearance and Policy Unit to take on this responsibility. This Unit, among other tasks related to land-mines, is responsible for Headquarters support for planning and implementation of ongoing United Nations mine-clearance programmes and, in close collaboration with the technical experts of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and with the assistance of other United Nations organizations and agencies, for planning and

overseeing the implementation of new programmes to provide assistance in mine clearance to affected countries.

17. Recognizing that mine clearance is a long-term process, the focus of United Nations policy is on the creation or strengthening of indigenous national mine-clearance programmes. In addition, appreciating the importance of activities such as mine-awareness training, and medical treatment and rehabilitation, in which United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO) have long played an active role, United Nations policy emphasizes the integration of such activities into a larger comprehensive integrated programme structure. Agencies and interested organizations will continue their efforts to assist the victims of land-mines, but it is now envisioned that in the future, wherever possible, they will do so in the context of larger integrated mine-action programmes.

18. In this respect, the focus of United Nations efforts is to assist Governments to create civilian bodies with the capacities to conduct mine-awareness programmes, do minefield surveys, conduct clearance operations, carry out training and manage and finance de-mining programmes. By training local de-miners, supervisors, instructors and programme management personnel, the United Nations strives ultimately to give countries the long-term means to deal with their land-mine problems.

19. The practicality of the new comprehensive United Nations policy on assistance in mine clearance was tested in Mozambique. In June 1994, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs intervened to revitalize the moribund mine-clearance programme. With the assistance of instructors and programme management personnel from interested Member States, the United Nations was able to design and oversee the creation of the Accelerated De-mining Programme in Mozambique.

20. Within the space of six months, 30 teams of Mozambican de-miners (more than 450 men) had been trained, fully equipped and deployed. In addition, training courses were begun to provide instruction for skilled Mozambican personnel sufficient to allow them to assume programme-management responsibility for this national mine-clearance capacity. To date, de-miners of the Accelerated De-mining Programme have removed more than 3,000 land-mines from sites located near the three main population centres in southern Mozambique. At the same time, United Nations contractors, working under the direction of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in one project and the World Food Programme (WFP) in another, cleared more than 2,000 kilometres of priority roads in central Mozambique. UNHCR, working with local groups, conducted intense mine-awareness training among Mozambican refugee populations in Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

21. Since August 1994, at the request of national authorities or United Nations personnel, joint Department of Humanitarian Affairs/Department of Peace-keeping Operations assessment missions have visited Angola, Georgia, Rwanda and Yemen. The purpose of these missions was to assess the scope of the land-mine problem in each country and to determine an appropriate plan for the most effective provision of assistance in mine clearance. On the basis of these assessment missions and mine-action plans developed jointly between the two Departments,

the United Nations has begun mine-action programmes in Angola and Yemen, and is only awaiting government consent before beginning similar integrated programmes in Georgia and Rwanda.

22. An important tool to assist in the creation of such programmes and the coordination of United Nations policy is the central land-mine database developed by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The database stores information on countries with land-mine problems. It notes the location of mined areas, mine types, the number of mines laid, de-mining programme information, land-mine casualties, the names and credentials of expert de-mining personnel, etc. In assembling such information in one place, the United Nations has created a valuable tool for improving the efficiency of existing programmes and for planning future programmes. Analysis of the information contained in the database will enable the United Nations to identify more quickly the most productive clearance methods and organizational structures in use by United Nations programmes and by non-governmental organizations. Member States, United Nations agencies and other interested parties are granted ready access to the database.

23. In addition to the practical efforts to provide assistance to populations in mine-affected States, the Secretary-General and the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations system have been active advocates for the victims of land-mines as well. The Secretary-General, aware of the enormous humanitarian toll being taken by land-mines, has called upon Member States to consider enacting a complete ban on the production, use and transfer of anti-personnel land-mines. He has said that land-mines should carry the same international stigma as that currently attached to chemical and biological weapons.

24. A number of United Nations organizations involved with humanitarian assistance activities, such as UNICEF and UNHCR, as well as the ICRC, have also been active participants in the deliberations of the Group of Governmental Experts to prepare a conference to review the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, arguing strenuously for the strongest possible restrictions on the use of land-mines. In all areas, the United Nations continues to be in the forefront of international efforts to address the global problem of uncleared land-mines.

V. OTHER INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

25. A number of regional organizations have been devoting significant resources to the provision of assistance in mine clearance and other efforts to address the problems associated with land-mines. The Organization of American States (OAS) began a programme in 1993 to assist the war-torn countries of Central America with mine clearance. The first element of this programme began in Nicaragua. Instructors from a number of Latin American nations, through the auspices of the Inter-American Defense Board, trained a special de-mining unit of the Nicaraguan Armed Forces, consisting of roughly 120 de-miners. These de-miners succeeded in removing 6,514 land-mines before funding problems caused the programme to pause in September 1994. OAS also provided technical advice to Suriname to assist in efforts to survey the country for land-mines. That

mission was successfully accomplished. OAS is currently planning to rejuvenate its clearance programme and to expand its scope to provide assistance in mine clearance to Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras.

26. In addition to these efforts, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) discussed the issue of mine clearance at its meeting at Addis Ababa in February 1995. The European Union - which has been extremely active in funding mine-clearance operations in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq and elsewhere - is seeking to increase the impact of its efforts to provide assistance in mine clearance. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the League of Arab States (LAS) are also exploring ways in which they can extend assistance to Member States affected by land-mines.

27. A variety of non-governmental organizations are also involved in clearing land-mines and easing the impact of land-mines on populations in affected areas. Three such organizations, the Mines Advisory Group, Norwegian People's Aid and Halo Trust, have gained special recognition for their mine-clearance work in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Iraq, Mozambique and elsewhere. These organizations have often worked for, or in close cooperation with, United Nations agencies and mine-action programmes. ICRC, Handicap International, Médecins sans frontières, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other organizations have long been involved in the problems associated with the medical treatment and rehabilitation of land-mine victims.

28. Many other international and national non-governmental organizations have funded mine clearance, mine-awareness training and medical programmes in a variety of mine-affected countries. Non-governmental organizations have also been in the forefront of the campaign against land-mines. Non-governmental organizations such as the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam International, Save the Children and others have been extremely effective in researching and analysing data concerning land-mines and in raising international consciousness on issues related to land-mines.

VI. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

29. The ability to find and destroy land-mines greatly depends on the availability of resources. Mine clearance is an enormously expensive process. As stated above, while small anti-personnel land-mines can be bought for less than $3 each, it costs between $300 and $1,000 to find and remove each one. In addition, experience has shown that de-mining programmes need most of their funding at the outset of operations, to allow early mine-awareness education and to cover the purchase of equipment, the establishment of mine-clearance training schools and the training of de-mining technicians.

30. Existing appeal mechanisms are often too slow to meet the financial demands of a de-mining programme in its early stages. While the largest part of the budget for a mine-action programme is needed at the commencement of the programme, funding from appeal mechanisms can take six months or more to arrive. These delays in receiving funding in turn impose unrecoverable delays in the training and mine-removal schedule, exposing populations to greater danger for

longer periods of time. These delays also make programme planning extremely difficult, both because the situation on the ground can change markedly in the period of time prior to the receipt of appeal funding, and because the capital-intensive parts of a mine action programme, which are needed immediately, may have to wait a long time for sufficient funding.

31. After experiencing such funding delays in a number of United Nations mine-action programmes, it became obvious that there was a need for a new method of channelling critical resources to worthy mine-assistance projects in a timely manner. In September 1994, the Secretary-General announced the establishment of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance to fulfil this role. The Trust Fund was created as a financial instrument to complement existing mechanisms, to enable quick start-up and continuity of mine-clearance assistance programmes, as well as for funding urgent projects until resources become available. It is not intended to replace existing sources of funding for mine-clearance programmes received from humanitarian appeals.

32. For 1995, the United Nations has sought $65 million-$70 million from assessed budget resources and humanitarian appeals to fund the cost of current de-mining programmes and projects in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Georgia, Mozambique, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Yemen. It is estimated that, in the course of the next 12 months, the United Nations may also provide, or be requested to provide, additional mine-action assistance in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, Croatia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Lebanon, Liberia, Peru, Rwanda, Tajikistan and Uganda. The additional cost for the provision of such assistance, based on past costs for similar programmes, could increase the estimated cost for 1995 to $83 million.

33. As significant as this global budget is for assistance in mine clearance, this figure is minuscule when compared with the estimated $57 billion it will cost to remove the 110 million estimated land-mines currently in place. If the world is to rid itself of uncleared land-mines, significantly increased resources would be required. In the long run, the problem is one that must be handled by the affected States themselves; the United Nations can only help to provide the tools for them to complete the task. After the United Nations involvement has ceased, mine-clearance programmes must be sustained by the same means as other government activities.

34. In the absence of national resources or direct bilateral assistance to fund mine action, international lending institutions will be confronted with the problem. Regional development banks, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will need to understand the character of national de-mining efforts as intimately linked to the success of overall development strategies and projects they approve. The adverse impact of uncleared land-mines on national development and, conversely, the importance of de-mining in spurring national rehabilitation, economic growth and development needs to be fully recognized.

VII. OBSERVATIONS

35. Under present conditions, for each 2 million newly laid land-mines (which is the lowest current estimated rate of mining world wide), an additional burden of at least $600 million is imposed upon the world community for their removal. This does not include the expanding costs imposed by land-mines on affected States in terms of lost economic productivity, increasing medical and welfare costs and increased national dependence on foreign aid.

36. It is critical that the international community focus increased resources on the means for overcoming the land-mine problem, in order to avoid a vast "de-mining debt" in the future. While the United Nations has developed a strategy for helping nations to cope with problems of uncleared land-mines, the scope of the problem dwarfs current international efforts to deal with its consequences. Member States must agree on effective measures to stop the proliferation of land-mines if this problem is ever to be solved. At the same time, the international community must rise to the challenge of developing and deploying more effective de-mining technology.

37. The scope of the global problem of uncleared land-mines is so enormous and its humanitarian consequences so devastating that it is only through the concerted efforts of concerned Member States, working in close cooperation with each other, that significant progress will be made on this issue. It is one of the fundamental tasks of the United Nations to facilitate and enhance such international cooperation, and it is hoped that the International Meeting on Mine Clearance will assist Member States in this regard.